Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

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I gladly yield my Editorial through lack of space! MPB

The Central America group meeting of 25 February 1989.

This year the Central America group held an informal meeting on the afternoon of 25 February in the Victory Services Club, Marble Arch, when four members gave semi-formal displays.

The proceedings opened with a display of some fifty sheets of Costa Rican postal history by Richard Saundry. The theme of this display was postmarks and on show were a selection of covers showing 'buzonero', 'casillero', 'depto. de rezagos', 'transito' target cancellations, instructional markings, slogan postmarks and first flight cachets.

This was followed by a comprehensive display by Mark Spycher of "via Aereo Transatlantico" postmarks on cover accompanied by a detailed description of this service. Items were not only from Guatemala but also from Costa Rica.

A display by David Bailey of the "Opera House in San Jose, Costa Rica", took us on a fascinating and informative tour, not only explaining the history of this interesting building, but through a judicial choice of Costa Rican postage stamps, picture postcards and even banknotes we were led into the foyer, up the grand staircase and into the auditorium itself. It was generally agreed by all present that this gem of a display was an object lesson to all of how a thematic display could be put together.

Finally Leslie Wilkinson illustrated the postal operations in the Islands of Utila and Roatan, the Bay Islands of the Republic of Honduras. In his inimitable style Leslie Wilkinson showed how a regular correspondence with the postmaster on Utila had elicited much useful knowledge concerning the postal arrangements in these islands, and many interesting modern covers with unusual postal markings.

Everyone who attended the meeting agreed that this was one of the more interesting meetings held in recent years, and it is hoped that next season this venture may be repeated, and incorporate informal displays from other group members so that we can see material from the Republics not represented on this occasion.

RHS

HONDURAS: THE 15c BISECT OF 1924

In response to Mr van Rijn's query regarding the 15c bisect of 1924, Richard Washburn, Henry Madden and José Mejia have written with information, background and illustrations. Before detailing the philatelic events surrounding this bisect we reproduce here an article by Irving Green, which first appeared in "Stamps" in the US in May 1945, ehich is not only interesting in itself, but provides background to the events. Courtesy of Richard Washburn.

A PHILATELIC STORY FROM HONDURAS

My friend Mr Petingill, an American, worked for the Standard Fruit & Shipping Co., (Vaccaro Bros) in La Ceiba, Honduras, during the years 1922 to 1926. La Ceiba, a city of 8 000 population was quite dependent on the fruit company for its existence. Many natives were employed on the company's banana plantations in the surrounding country. Violent fights between natives were frequent, particularly on Sundays when overindulgence of strong drinks and cock fighting stimulated the easily excited Latin temperament. The machete, a large, vicious looking sharp-edged knife being the favourite Honduran instrument of destruction, severe injuries often resulted from these mêlèes.

One Sunday afternoon in 1923, Mr Petingill, while strolling through the local park, noticed a stranger on a bench suffering from a severe head wound. Inquiring why a doctor had not been consulted, the stranger replied that he had no money. "Come with me" urged Mr Petingill, and helped the wounded man to the fruit company's hospital, a few blocks away. In a short time Raul Gonzales, the patient, had the wound treated and Mr Petingill paid the $8.50 doctor fee. Raul thanked his benefactor and vowed that some day he would repay the kind deed.

Some months later, in the fall of 1923, to be exact, Honduras was conducting its presidential election. President Gutierrez was to complete his term on February 1, 1924. Three candidates were running for office: Carias, Bonilla and Arias. None of the candidates received the required majority in the election. Congress undertook to choose a president, but no candidate could command the necessary 46 congressional votes. At this point Gutierrez siezed the opportunity to declare himself dictator and to remain in office whereupon Carias with Gen. Tosta as his military aide, began a revolution. Gutierrez fled for his life to Ampala where he died shortly thereafter. The failure of the political factions to restore constitutional government by peaceful means caused the United States to sever diplomatic relations with Honduras on February 13, 1924, and during the following months the US Marines were landed at various points on both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts for the protection of foreign lives and property.

In order to gain economic control over the country, the revolutionaries directed their attack towards the north Atlantic ports. La Ceiba was attacked on February 29, 1924. Damage to the extent of $6 000 000 resulted. Hundreds lost their lives. The American Consulate was fired upon and a US citizen killed and others wounded. Then the US Marines from the warship Billingsly landed and they declared the property of the Standard Fruit Company a neutral zone. The populace flocked there for protection.

The first objective of the revolutionist attack had been the main post office building. Postmaster Cuella bravely refused admittance to the marauders but was shot dead.

Mr Petingill witnessed this shooting from a nearby doorway. At this moment he was detected and a group approached him menacingly. Turning to flee for his life, he heard his name called and recognised Raul Gonzalez as the leader of the group. "Don't be afraid, we won't harm you," said Raul and handing Mr Petingill a small roll of paper he continued, "I hope this repays you for your past kindness. Now run for the neutral zone." Mr Petingill needed no further advice and bolted for the fruit company's grounds. When he regained his breath he opened the roll of paper and found that it consisted of nearly 200 sheets of Honduras Scott No 205, about 5 000 stamps in all, and one sheet had the rare purple surcharge No 206.

When Mr Petingill returned to the United States in 1926 he disposed of the lot to New York and Boston stamp dealers, and in the writer's collection of Honduras repose several specimens from the sheet of No 206.

Gen. Tosta was appointed provisional president of Honduras pending a new election. Near the end of 1924 an honest election under the supervision of the US Marines was held and Dr Paz Baraona received an overwhelming majority and on February 1, 1925, became president. And so ended the revolution of 1924.

A philatelic consequence of the revolution was the order issued by the Postmaster General instructing all departmental postmasters to mark the stamps in their possession with a control so as to idetify them from those that had been stolen. The control mark specified was the signature of the departmental postmaster. As no rubber marking stamps were available in many of the small localities, the postmasters resorted to the use of manuscript signatures. At La Esperanza the postmaster located a rubber stamp depicting a hand pointing to the left with its index finger. This was applied in black as a control mark.

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The revolution outlined in Irving Green's article, prevented the distribution of 6c stamps to meet the reduction in the US rate from 15c to 6c around February 1922. This also became the inland rate and the rate to other Latin American countries. Government and business had come to a halt, and La Ceiba, far removed from Tegucigalpa was cut off from any resupply of stamps from the main post office and had to make do with the stocks on hand.

To finish our story, Henry Madden who confirms the above rate, sends a study of La Ceiba covers, some 11 in all. He goes on:- "it would seem that La Ceiba had exhausted its supply of 6 centavos stamps the year before (1923) and was making do with 1 centavos and 5 centavos stamps to make up the 6 centavos rate. By April of 1924, these two stamps seem to have been just about exhausted and the bisecting began (figure 1 below).

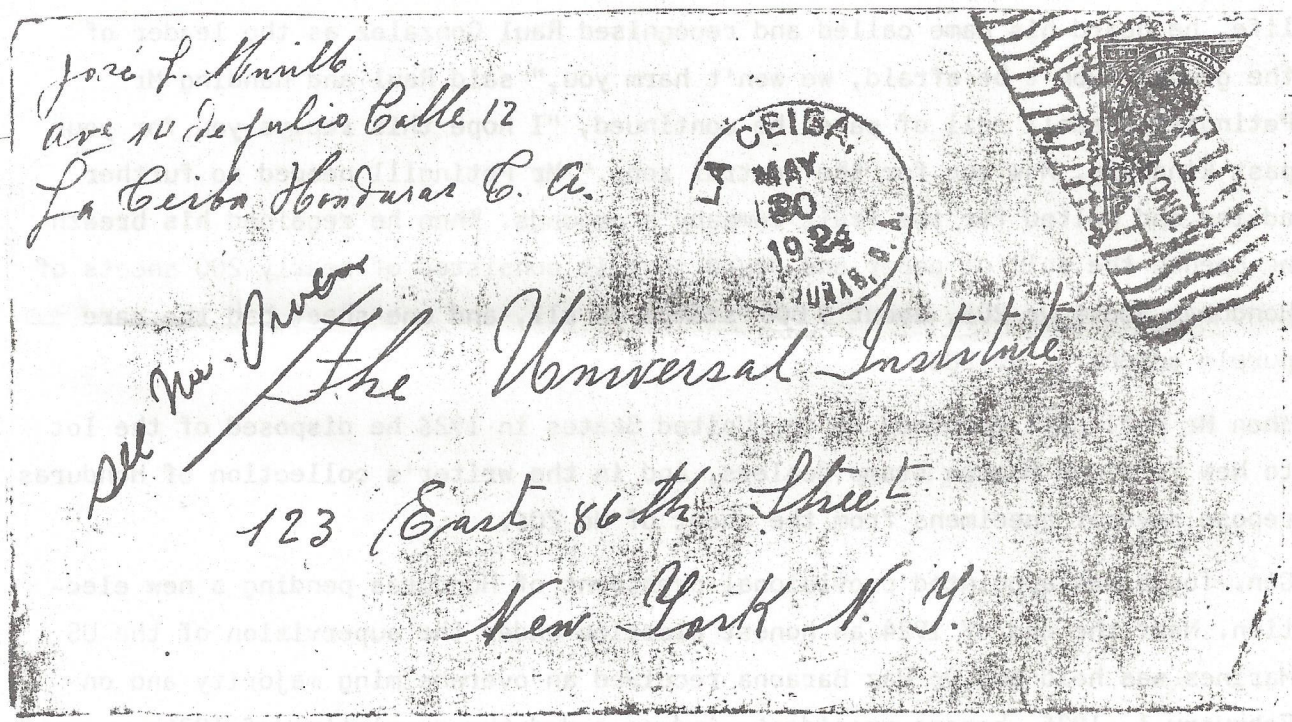


Figure 1. A cover from La Ceiba to New York, franked with a bisected 15 centavos adhesive to prepay the 6 centavo rate on May 30, 1924. (Richard Washburn)

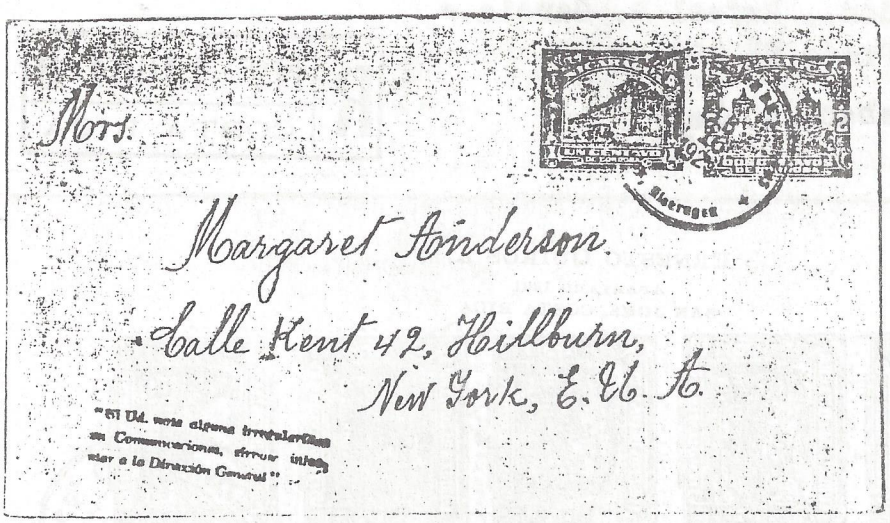
All the covers noted are direct to the US, Spain and the Islands commercial houses from the same in La Ceiba. No interior covers with the 6 centavos rate have yet come to light and are probably quite scarce due to the lack of internal correspondence during the revolution. The partial front (figure 2), is a reminder that some 'made up' covers do exist. This piece is franked with bisected 10c and 20c adhesives joined, and bisected 15c and 10c adhesives joined, making a total of 27½c!

Figure 2. A philatelic franking of mixed bisects. (Henry Madden)

The fall of Tegucigalpa on May 6, 1924, resulted in a truce between the warring parties. Under the direction of the US State Department and the other Central American countries a peace conference was held from April 24 to May 5. As a result General Vincente Tosta was made the provisional head of Government with a return to partial normalcy. The 1924 Herrera was released from storage in the Custom House in Ampala and placed on sale in Tegucigalpa on May 23, 1924. We can imagine a supply of these stamps arrived 3 or 4 weeks later and we should find no more 1919 bisects much after June 15 from La Ceiba."

Henry Madden

NICARAGUA: AN UNUSUAL CACHET



Denis Kilner sends us a photocopy of an unusual cachet found on a Nicaraguan cover of the 1920's. It reads "Si Ud nota alguna irregularidas en Communicaciones, Sir...(?) informer a la Direcccion General." Which broadly means that you should inform the Director General (of the Post Office) if you note any irregularities about the letter. He asks "Why would this handstamp be put on this letter?"

Denis further asks if anyone knows any decrees relating to the usage of R de C stamps, particularly as to the periods of usage, and the countries to which they did and did not apply.

As usual, correspondence via the editor is welcomed.

COSTA RICA: THE PROBABLE FIRST DAY OF ISSUE OF THE 5 CENTAVOS DEFINITIVE STAMP OF 1930

by RICHARD SAUNDRY

Registered covers are of more than passing interest to postal historians: they generally have transit and receiving office date stamps in addition to those found on contemporary regular mails, thus often providing vital evidence of postal routes and transit times. I recently acquired a Costa Rican registered cover sent from San Jose to Cuba in 1930. The principle reason for acquiring this cover is that in general there is a comparative paucity of Costa Rican covers addressed to the other Republics of Central America and Latin America in general, compared with the much more readily encountered (relatively common) covers addressed to the United States or to Europe, principally to the UK, Germany or Switzerland.

In the case of this cover to Cuba there was a total franking of 53 cmos comprising the 5 cmos postal stationery envelope (H&G 14) with a single copy of the 3 cmos adhesive of 1926 (SG 165, Saenz 360, Scott 143), and on the reverse securely sealing the envelope a block of nine of the 1930 5 cmos issue (SG 175, Saenz 383, Scott 155) all neatly tied to the envelope with clearly legible postmarks of San Jose of February 7th. It was a surprise to find that the date for issue of the 5 cmos stamp given in the catalogues was 21st February (Gibbons); Saenz cites the date of the authorising decree No.56, as 17th February.

There is little possibility that the date in the San Jose cancellor had been erroneously set since there is the confirmatory evidence of the Havana receiving office date stamp (12th February) totally consistent with the time required to send a letter that far using surface means, but also pre-dating the catalogued first date of issue. I note that the letter was sent by Ernesto Quiros A who was responsible for sending many of the more philatelically interesting surviving covers of the period, who may have been a philatelist.

I carefully re-inspected the cover and I found that on the front top LH corner are traces of a pencil mark: "1er Dia/ 5c" indicating that I had acquired a first day cover for the 5 cmos stamp. Presumably sometime in the past an incorrect date of issue for this stamp (21 February) was given and has been perpetuated in all the other catalogues. The correct date of issue in all probablility is the 7th February. The lesson to be learnt from this is that it is always worth checking the date of issue of any given stamp on cover to see whether there is inconsistency. Usually such a discrepancy is an indicator of a bogus or faked cover. Here, however, is an example of how the confirmatory dates on a registered cover can be used to provide almost certain evidence that an apparent discrepant date in a postmark is in fact genuine and that in fact all the authoratative catalogues are in error. I wonder if there are any other comparable errors in the catalogues? Perhaps a study of other relevent registered covers could be of use to verify the dates of issue of other Costa Rican stamps of this period.

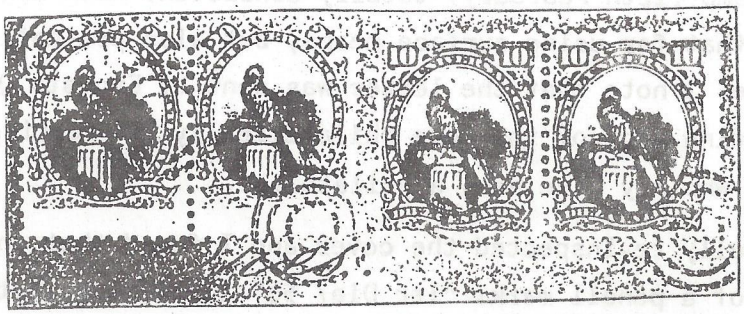
Incidentally, the franking of 53 cmos on this registered cover is almost certainly incorrect. Under the terms of the Pan American Postal Union surface-mediated letters were exchanged between member signatories at their prevailing domestic rates. I compute, therefore, that in 1930 a registered cover to Cuba should have been franked at 30 cmos registration plus 13 cmos, the domestic letter rate, i.e. 43 cmos. To other (UPU) countries the rate should have been 35 cmos registration plus 20 cmos letter rate amounting to 55 cmos. I also note that in Higgins & Gage the date of issue of the 5 cmos stationery envelope is given as (? 1930). Clearly this is an early date of use for this item of Costa Rican postal stationery and it would be nice to know if anyone has seen an earlier date of use. All in all quie a lot of interest to be gleaned from what at first sight was just an ordinary-looking cover.

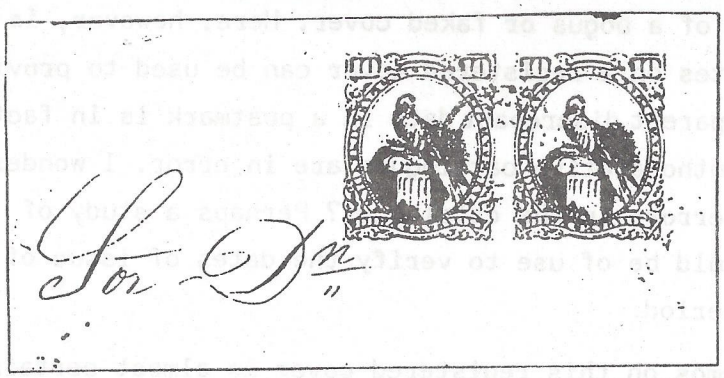
Guatemala

FURTHER NOTES ON "BOGUS, FAKED AND DUBIOUS CANCELLATIONS ON 19TH CENTURY STAMPS"

by MARK SPYCHER

Following my article in CANL VolII, No 34 of January this year, Mr Jack Jonza, prominent and long-standing member of the ISGC, has kindly sent me photostats of further fraudulent fragments in his possession. It is my belief that these should be illustrated for the benefit of our members as there may exist similar pieces.

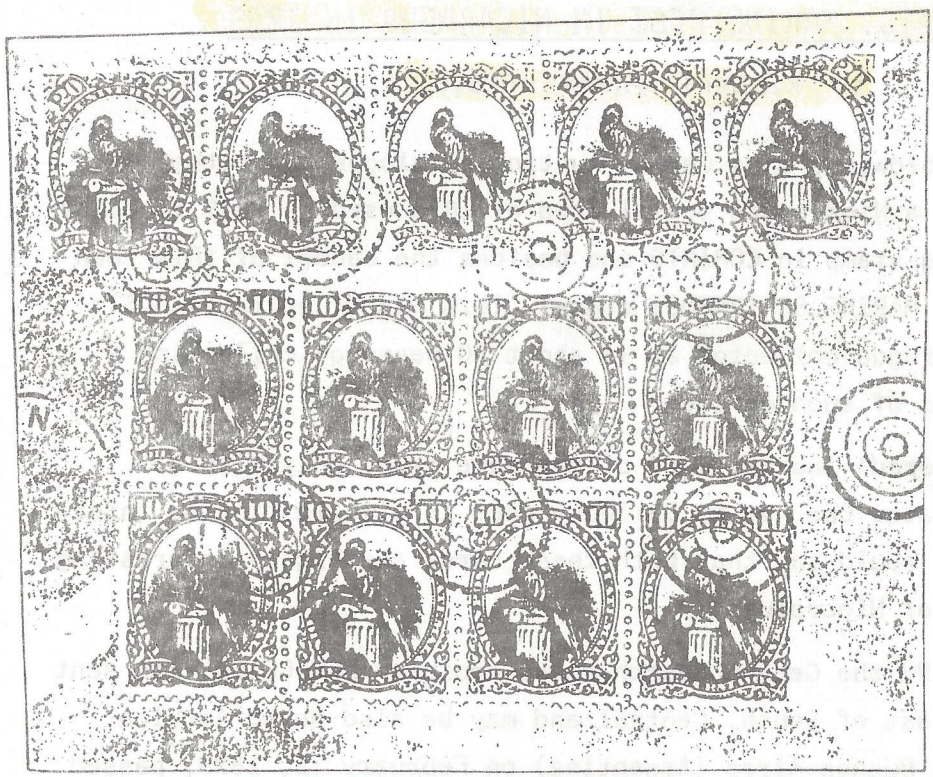


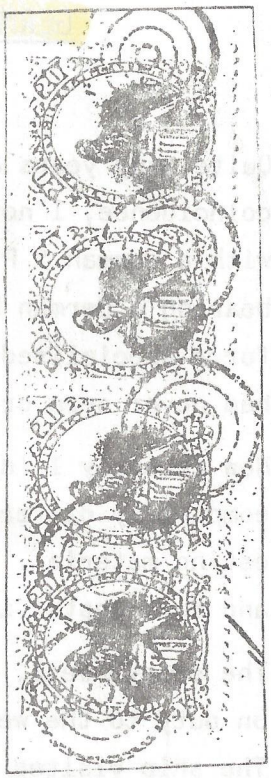


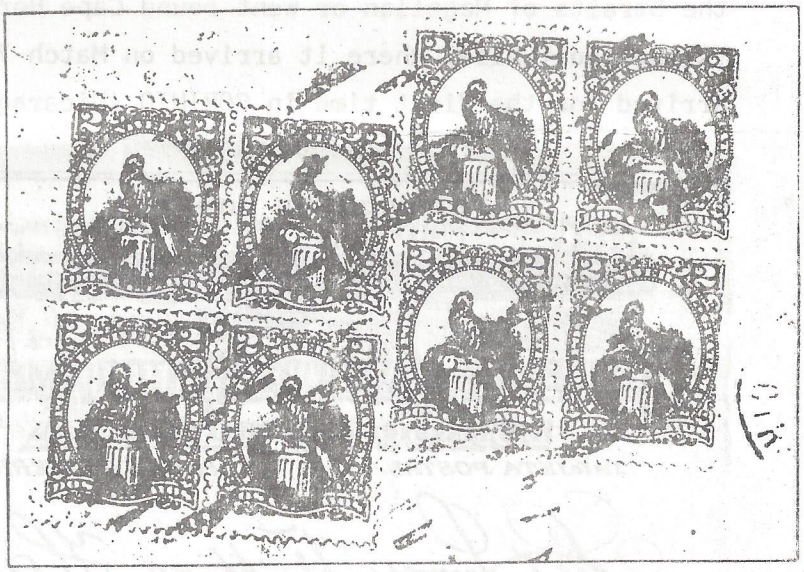
Mr Jonza supplied the following information:- "these pieces were acquired some years ago from a US dealer specialising in Central American stamps and postal history, who, in turn, received them from a London source. The dealer in question appeared to have had close links with the famous forger RAOUL CH. DE THUIN of Yucatan fame.

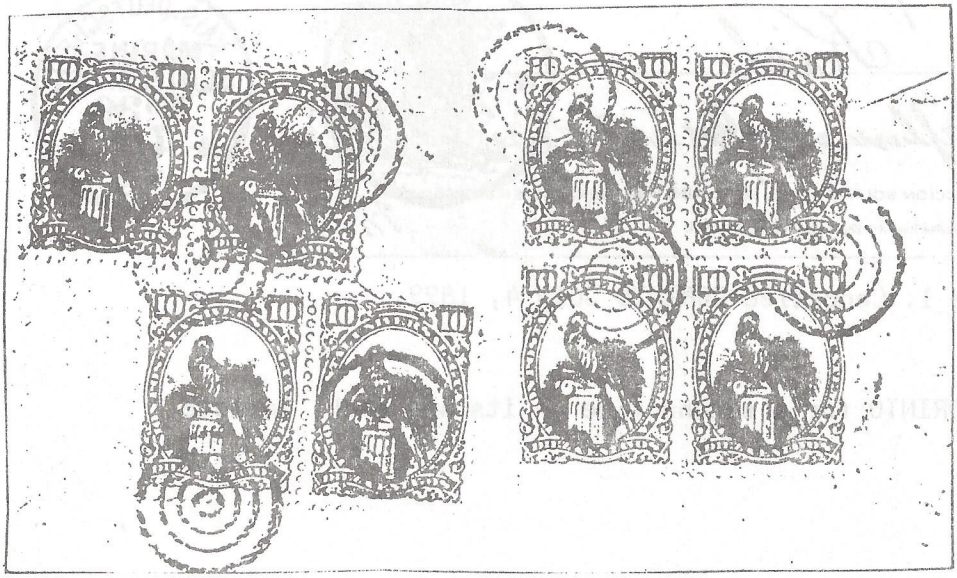
These fragments, unlike those illustrated in CANL No.34, bear no name stamps or signature whatsoever so undoubtedly originate from a different source. Quite likely they were the work of De Thuin."

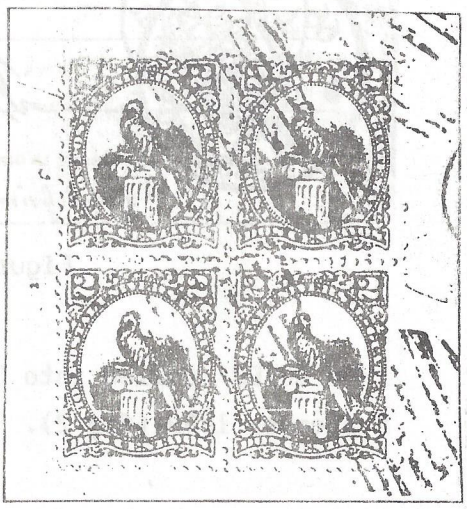
Is anybody in possession of similar material? Answers via the Editor please.











GERMAN KAIS. MARINE POST IN NICARAGUA IN 1899

by KILIAN E NATHAN FRPS,L

Quite many years ago, browsing in a German auction catalogue and rather by coincidence, I noticed a Nicaraguan postal card of 1898 used in 1899 together with a German 5 Pfennig stamp in CORINTO and besides the cancel of this town bearing a German KAIS. MARINE SCHIFFPOST cancel. This was of course a MUST for a specialised Nicaragua collector as in about 30 years of collecting I had never seen or heard of such an item.

Now recently I 'discovered' another card of the same type, only with a completely different date. One has to be lucky once in a while finding interesting material. And I would say that both these cards are highly interesting and rare postal items of Nicaragua.

The story? Well, in 1899 the German fourth-class cruiser 'MSM GEIER' was sent on duty to the west coast of South, Central and may be also North America. The ship visited first Buenos Aires (Argentina) on February 12, 1899, passed the Straits of Magellan or went round Cape Horn and went northbound to Valparaiso (Chile) where it arrived on Match 7, 1899. Sailing further north it arrived for the first time in CORINTO (Nicaragua) in early July 1899 (fig.1).

Figure 1. Cancelled CORINTO July 4, 1899.

'MSM GEIER' called into CORINTO for a second time on its way back, in late September 1899 (fig 2).

SERVICIO DE CORREOS.
REPUBLICA MAYOR DE CENTRO AMERICA
ESTADO DE NICARAGUA
TARJETA POSTAL
PARA EL INTERIOR
REICHSPOST
NOTA: ESCRIBASE LA DIRECCION SOLAMENTE EN ESTE LADO Y EL MENSAJE EN EL OTRO.
KAIS. DEUTSCHE MARINE-SCHIFFSPOST No 36
99

Figure 2. Cancelled CORINTO September 1899

As to the German MARINE POST cancels a short explanation:-

Since 1867 the mail was handed by the Paymasters of the ships in bundles to the German Consulates in foreign ports and was sent by them to the DEUTSCHE MARINE POSTBUERO (German Marine Post Office) in Berlin. They handled and forwarded the incoming mail and paid the normal German postal rates, getting the money back from the Paymasters of the ships on their return to the home port in Germany. The mail of the crews was postmarked BERLIN C2 (Official mail with C1) and date but with no further indications as to the ships etc..

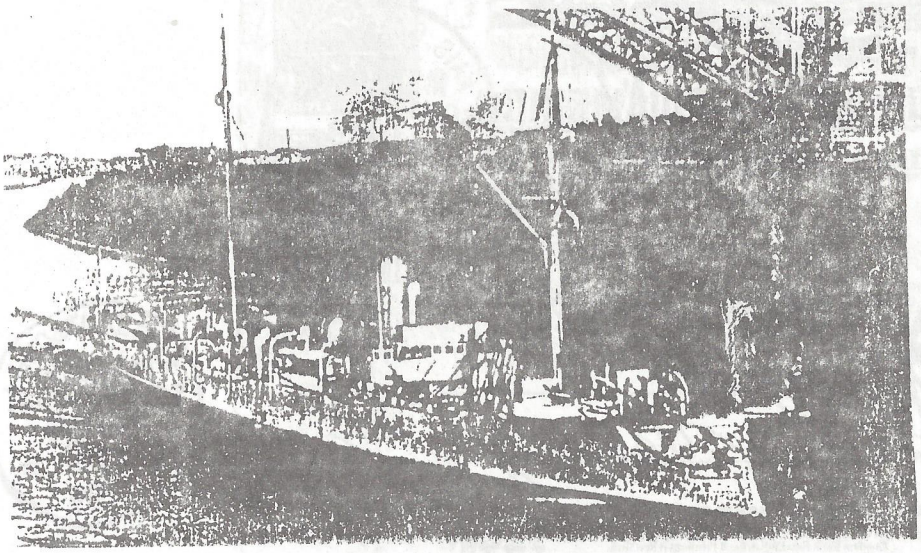
At the World Postal Congress in Vienna in 1891 it was agreed that the mail could be sent directly and that only the corresponding Inland rate (foreign + German) had to be paid. A new cancel was prepared and each ship got its number. The numbers went from 1 to 86 and the 'MSM GEIER' received the number 36 of the KAIS. MARINE SCHIFFPOST.

This simplified method was started on a trial basis in 1895 for ships sailing in the South Seas and in Eastern Asia. General use of these cancels started only June 1, 1897.

Finally a little remark: The writer of the card dated July 7, 1899 addressed to Kiel, Germany (figure 1) states: "Unfortunately PICTURE postcards are sold out and not available at the moment"!

Should any other collector reading these lines be also a lucky owner of such a card, or even a cover, from Nicaragua or any other Central American Country, I would be very grateful to him for detailed information, via the Editor.

Kleiner (Ungeschützter) Kreuzer *Geier*



The ship was built in the 'KAISERLICHE WERFT (wharf) WILHELMSHAVEN' and launched October 18, 1894. In 1899 she was used as 'unescorted' cruiser.

Crew: 161 to 166 men
Displacement: 1918t
L: 83·90m W: 10·6m
D: 5·22m
Speed: 16·2 knots
Guns: 8 x 10·5cm
2 x 45cm

Captain: from December 1897 to November 1899 - 'Corvette Captain' JACOBSEN.

MSM 'GEIER' left KIEL (Germany) on December 9, 1897 and arrived in Charlotte Amalie (St Thomas) on January 3, 1898. Left for Santiago de Cuba, La Guaira and Puerto Cabello (Venezuela). In Port of Spain (March 24 - April6, 1898) the Captain received orders to visit Brasilian and Argentinian ports. After a stay in Pernambuco (April 16-20, 1898) she arrived in Bahia on April 23 and received there new orders. Because of the war declared between the United States and Spain, she should return immediately to the West Indies. Following her stay in the Caribbean and several landings in different ports and after the peace treaty between the US and Spain, the MSM 'GEIER' visited New Orleans (October 14-25, 1898) and left again for South America visiting ports of regions where many Germans were living. In Buenos Aires she received orders to sail to the West coast of Latin America. She passed through the Straits of Magellan on February 20-23, 1899 and visited Valparaiso, Callao and Panama. From there, MSM 'GEIER' went to San José de GUATEMALA and together with a British Cruiser, enforced payments from the Guatemala Government.

After this the ship went to CORINTO, Punta Arenas and again to Panama. On her way south she had to turn again in Guayaquil and to sail again to Panama, CORINTO and San José (Guatemala). The reason for this was that after the 1895/97 formed Union between El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and NICARAGUA, i.e. the Republica Mayor de Centro America, had fallen apart by 1898/99 and uprisings and revolutions were going on in Nicaragua and Captain Jacobsen received orders to protect German citizens and property on CORINTO and other places. This mission terminated, the MSM 'GEIER' went north to San Francisco (14.8-18.9.1899) and Vancouver (18.10.99) and from there sailed south again. On 9.7.1900 she left for Asia and the BOXER war.